

Introduction

Chuck Wilt and Katia Hatter of the Columbus Parks and Recreation Department contacted the Indiana University Public Opinion Lab in December 2001. The Parks and Recreation Department wanted to conduct a survey to measure area residents' use of and satisfaction with park facilities and to evaluate the Parks Department's communication with the public. Over the next several months, the Parks Department and the Public Opinion Laboratory collaborated in the development of a research instrument to be administered by telephone interviews. A copy of the approved questionnaire is appended to this report (Appendix B).

When the instrument had been finalized, the staff of professional interviewers at the Public Opinion Laboratory called a randomly selected, stratified quota sample of 410 Bartholomew County residents. The following sections describe this sample and the main findings of the research.

The Sample

The Indiana University Public Opinion Laboratory completed interviews with 410 Bartholomew County residents. Of those we interviewed, 48.8% were male and 51.2% were female. The ages included in the sample range from 18 to over 55. Thirty-four percent of respondents were between 18 and 34 years old; 38% were between 35 and 54; 28% were 55 or older. Quota sampling was used to achieve these demographics, which are comparable to United States Census data on Bartholomew County.

Respondents' incomes were distributed along a fairly normal curve. The majority of respondents' incomes were clustered in the \$10,000-\$75,000 range, with the most common income group being \$30,000-\$50,000. A majority of respondents (76.1%) own

their homes, while 21% rent and 2.9% have some other arrangement. The most common education level was “High school graduate/GED,” (36.1%), followed by “college graduate” (22.7%) and “some college” (19.5%).

To determine a specific area of residence within Bartholomew County, we asked respondents for their ZIP code and their township of residence. A large majority of respondents (87.8%) reported that their ZIP code is either 47201 or 47203; these codes are associated with the city of Columbus proper. Other ZIP codes that were somewhat common were 47246, reported by 4.1% of respondents, and 47232, reported by 2.7% of respondents. Many other ZIP codes were reported by one or two respondents. The most common township of residence was Columbus township, where 55.6% of respondents indicated that they live. Other top townships included Wayne (4.4%), Clay (3.9%), German (3.7%), and Sandcreek (3.7%). A substantial percentage of respondents (14.1%) did not know the name of their township.

Main Findings

Use of park facilities

The first section of the interview dealt with respondents’ use of Columbus Parks and Recreation facilities. We asked respondents to list the parks they had visited in the past year. For each park a respondent mentioned, we asked how many times they had visited it in the past year. The table below presents the results of these questions. As can be seen in the table, the most commonly visited parks were Mill Race and Donner; there was a sharp drop-off in the distribution after these two.

Table 1: Columbus parks visited in the past year

Name of Park	% recalling a visit in the past year	Median number of visits
Mill Race Park	57.8%	5
Donner Park	53.4%	4
Lincoln Park	20.5%	5
Clifty Park	18.5%	5
Noblitt Park	10.7%	3
Blackwell/Westenedge Park	6.6%	10
The Commons	3.9%	8
Mead Village Park	2.0%	2
Harrison Ridge Park	2.0%	4
IUPU Columbus Park	1.7%	10
Richards School Park	1.5%	7.5
Pence Street Park	1.5%	6
Oakbrook Park	1.0%	6.5
Morningside Park	1.0%	3.5
Ninth Street Park	0.5%	1

In addition to asking respondents to list the parks they had visited, we also asked specifically whether they had visited the Commons, an indoor recreation area maintained by Columbus Parks and Recreation. As shown in the table above, just 3.9% of respondents mentioned the Commons among the parks they had visited. However, in response to our specific inquiry about the Commons, sixty-one percent of respondents indicated that they had visited it in the past year. This large disparity may be accounted

for by the difficulty of perceiving an indoor area as a “park.” However, the disparity may also point to difficulty of spontaneously generating a list of events that have happened throughout the past year. Since we did not remind respondents of the names of specific parks, the actual number of people who visited may be significantly higher than the figures reported in the table.

We also asked whether respondents or their family members currently participate in non-competitive outdoor recreation such as hiking, biking, and nature observation. Slightly under half of respondents or families (49%) do participate in such activities. Twenty-seven percent of respondents report that they or their family members are involved with walking; 20.2% report biking, and 17.1% report hiking. Those who participate in outdoor recreation were asked to name the places where they go to participate in these activities. The most common location, reported by 28.4% of respondents, was “in neighborhood/sidewalks/ streets.” The second through fifth most common answers were all Columbus-area parks. The table below shows the top locations for participating in non-competitive outdoor recreation.

Table 2: Where do you go to participate in outdoor recreation activities?

Location	% participating in outdoor recreation at this location
In neighborhood/sidewalks/streets	28.4%
Mill Race Park	24.4%
People Trails	12.4%
Clifty Park	10.4%
Donner Park	9.5%
Brown County Park	6.0%

Respondents who participate in non-competitive outdoor recreation were also asked, “Which of these activities should be organized and publicized by Columbus Parks and Recreation?” Most respondents had no opinion on this matter, or felt that activities were already appropriately organized and publicized. However, almost 8% of respondents mentioned walking and hiking, 4.9% mentioned biking, and 2.9% said that “any/all activities” should be publicized and organized by Columbus Parks and Recreation.

Satisfaction with park facilities

Respondents were generally satisfied with the state of park facilities. A large majority (87.1%) of respondents believe that the maintenance of City of Columbus park grounds and facilities is either “excellent” or “good;” only 1% believed that maintenance is poor. Most respondents (93.2%) also report that they feel safe while visiting Columbus Parks and Recreation sites and facilities. Furthermore, a majority (54.9%) feel that the city of Columbus has “just the right amount” of nature areas, although 31% believe that there are not enough nature areas.

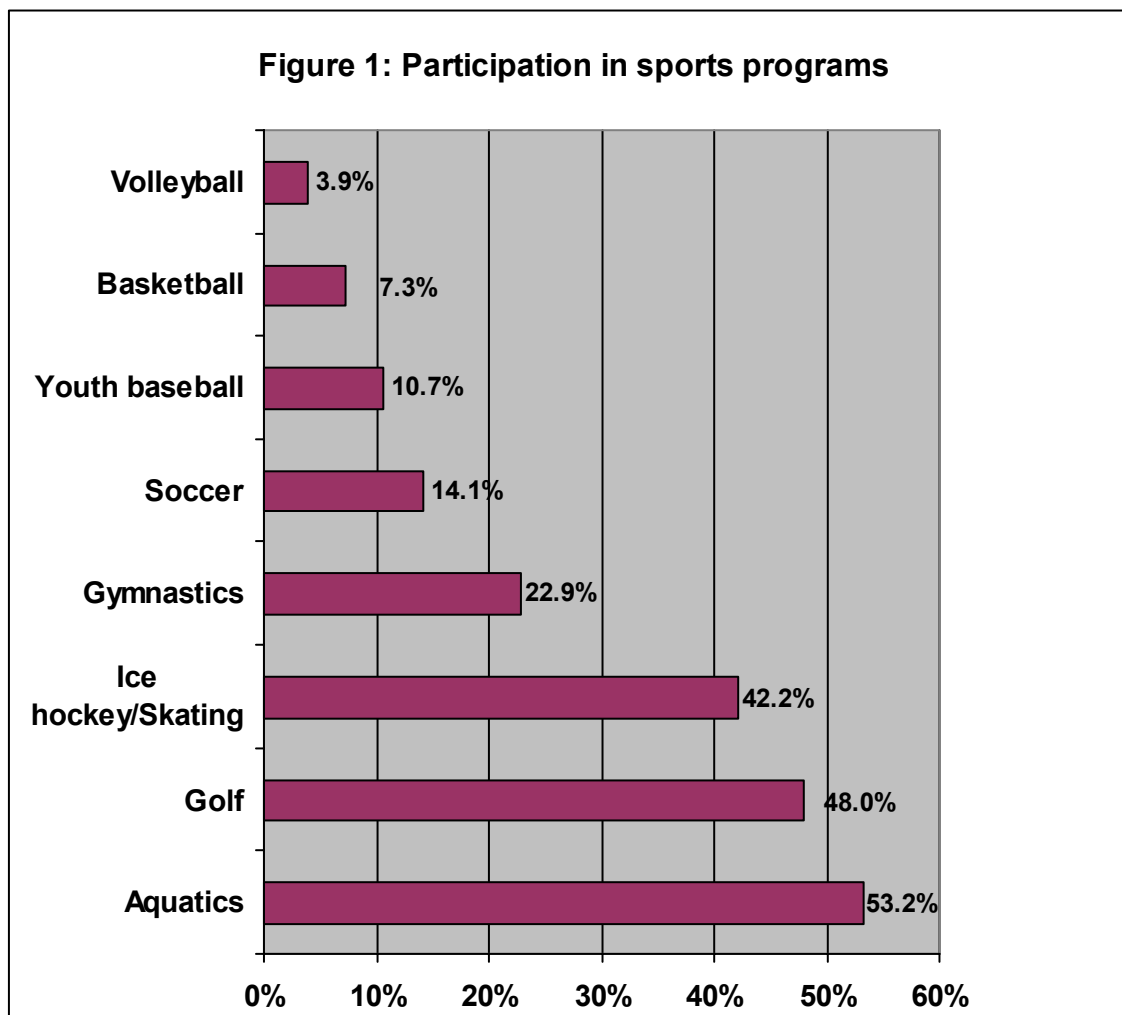
Slightly over 36% of respondents said they participate in fitness or recreation activities other than those sponsored by Columbus Parks and Recreation. Those who participated in these outside programs were asked, “Are there any services or facilities provided by these programs that you would like to see Columbus Parks and Recreation provide?” Less than half of participants in outside programs named a service or facility that they would like Columbus Parks and Recreation to provide. The most commonly requested services or facilities were exercise programs or facilities, including weight-lifting equipment. Six percent of respondents requested these facilities. Furthermore, two

percent of respondents requested more aquatic programs, and 1.5% requested aerobics classes and facilities.

Satisfaction with park activities

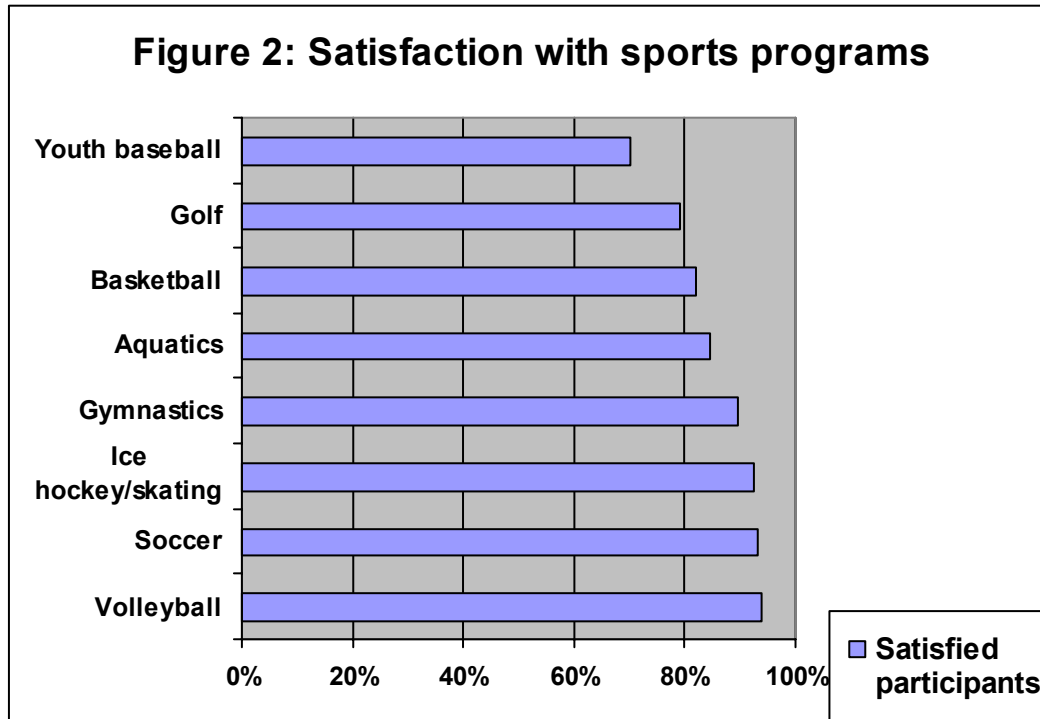
We asked respondents whether they had participated in a variety of programs and activities offered by Columbus Parks and Recreation. Those who had participated in each activity were asked to rate their experience, and in some cases we asked for their comments and suggestions on how to improve the programs. The interviews addressed both sports programs and other parks-sponsored activities. The chart on the next page presents the percentage of respondents who reported that they or their family members had participated in each sports program. The highest levels of participation were in aquatics and golf¹.

¹ Interviewers specifically asked respondents whether they or a family member had participated in aquatics, golf, gymnastics, and ice hockey. All other sports programs were spontaneously mentioned by respondents, who were asked to list other sports programs they or a family member had participated in. This may account for the large differences between reported participation in aquatics, golf, ice hockey, and gymnastics compared to reported participation in other sports programs.



Smaller numbers of respondents mentioned participation in various other sports programs; data on participation in these activities is provided in Appendix C: Marginal Tabulations.

Respondents who indicated that they had participated in a sports program were asked to rate their experience with the program. Ratings were overwhelmingly positive. The chart on the next page shows the percentage of participants in each program who rated the program as either “excellent” or “good.”



Those respondents who had participated in Columbus Parks and Recreation aquatic activities were asked, “What could Columbus Parks and Recreation do to improve its aquatic programs and/or facilities?” Most respondents did not have any particular suggestions in this regard – the most common answers were “don’t know” (38.9% of participants) and “nothing, it’s fine as it is” (19.2% of participants). However, top suggestions include expansion of pool facilities (10.1% of participants) and different or longer hours (9.2% of participants). Also, all respondents were asked whether they believe there are too many, not enough, or just the right amount of aquatic programs in Columbus. The most common answer was “just the right amount,” (46%) followed by “not enough” (28.8%) and “don’t know” (21.2%). Just 2.9% believe there are too many aquatic programs.

For golf, aquatics, and gymnastics, respondents who had not participated in the programs or used the facilities were asked why they had not participated. For golf, 85% of non-participants explained that they did not participate because they “don’t play golf.” Other reasons for non-participation in golf were varied; these data are available in Appendix C. For aquatic activities, reasons for non-participation were more widely distributed. Thirty-one percent of respondents who had not used Columbus Parks’ aquatic facilities explained that they are “not interested in swimming;” 16.8% use private facilities, and 11.5% cited time constraints. The most commonly cited reason for non-participation in gymnastics was “no interest in gymnastics,” mentioned by 56.5% of non-participants.

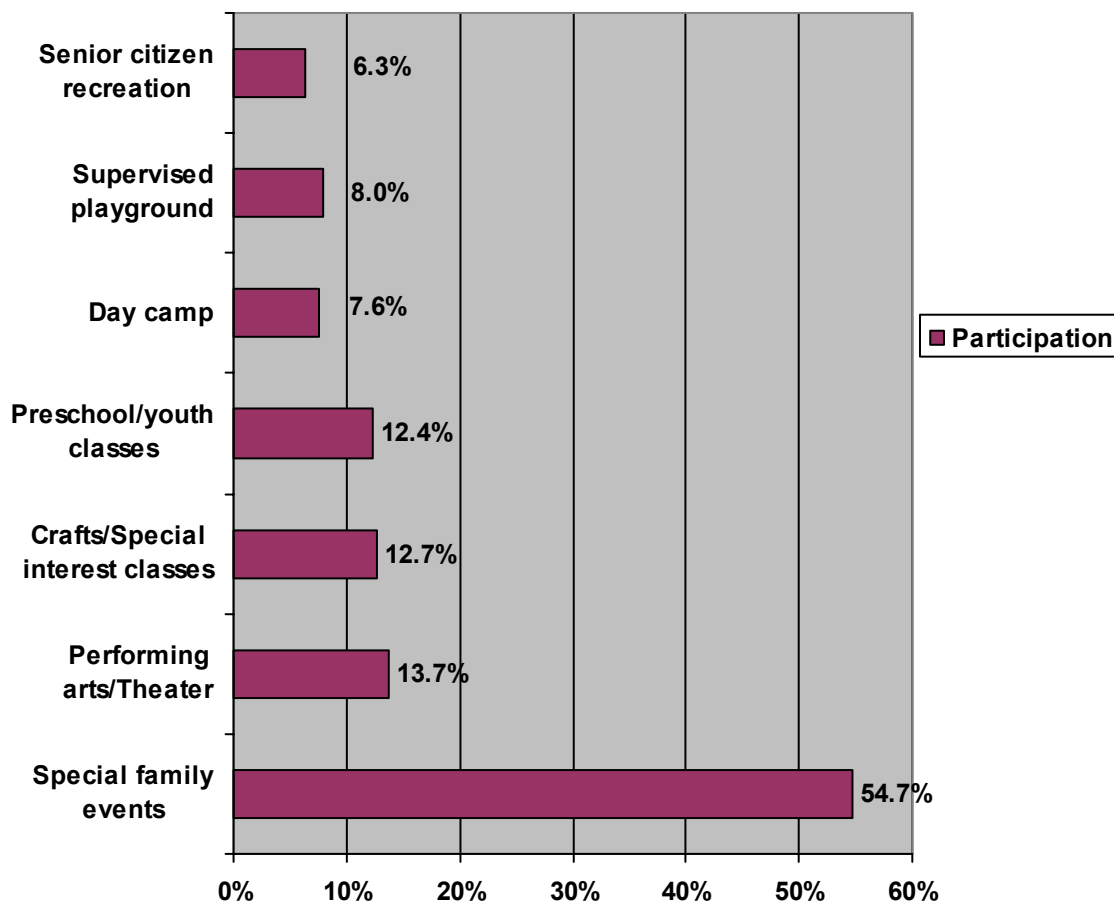
To conclude the section on sports programs, we asked all respondents, “Of the sports programs we have talked about today, which is the most important for you?” The table on the next page shows the top responses; a significant percentage (26.8%) did not know or indicate which was most important for them.

Table 3: Which sports program is most important for you?

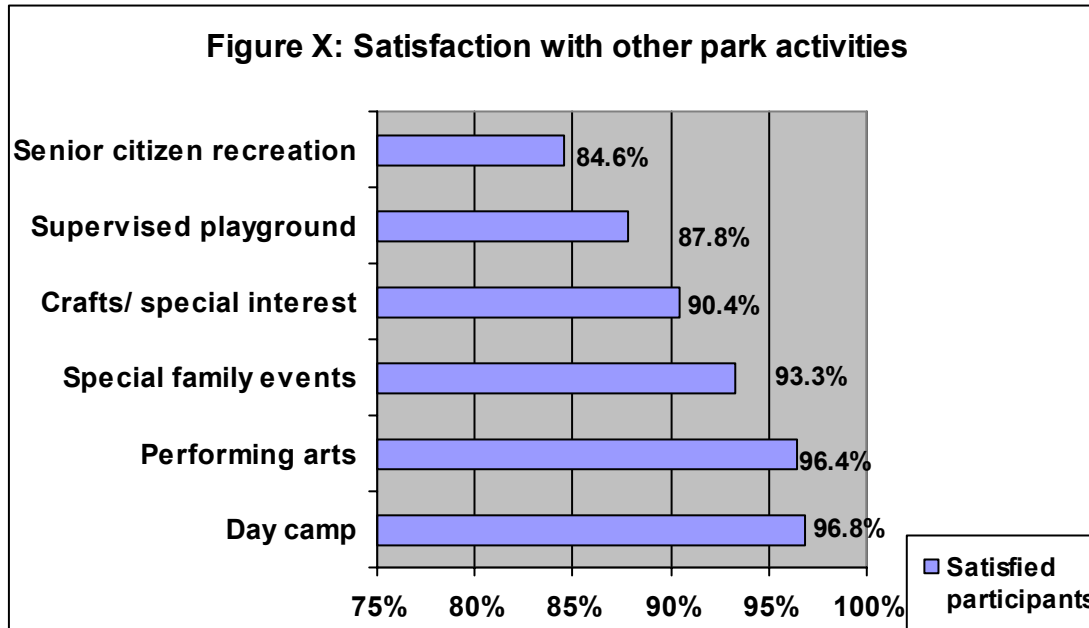
Sports program	% for whom this program is “most important”
Aquatics	18.5%
Golf	11.2%
Softball	10.0%
Soccer	7.3%
Ice hockey/ice skating	5.1%

In addition to sports programs and activities, respondents were also asked about their participation in and satisfaction with non-sports activities sponsored by Columbus Parks and Recreation. The chart below presents the percentage of respondents who said that they or a family member had participated in each activity.

Figure 4: Participation in other park activities

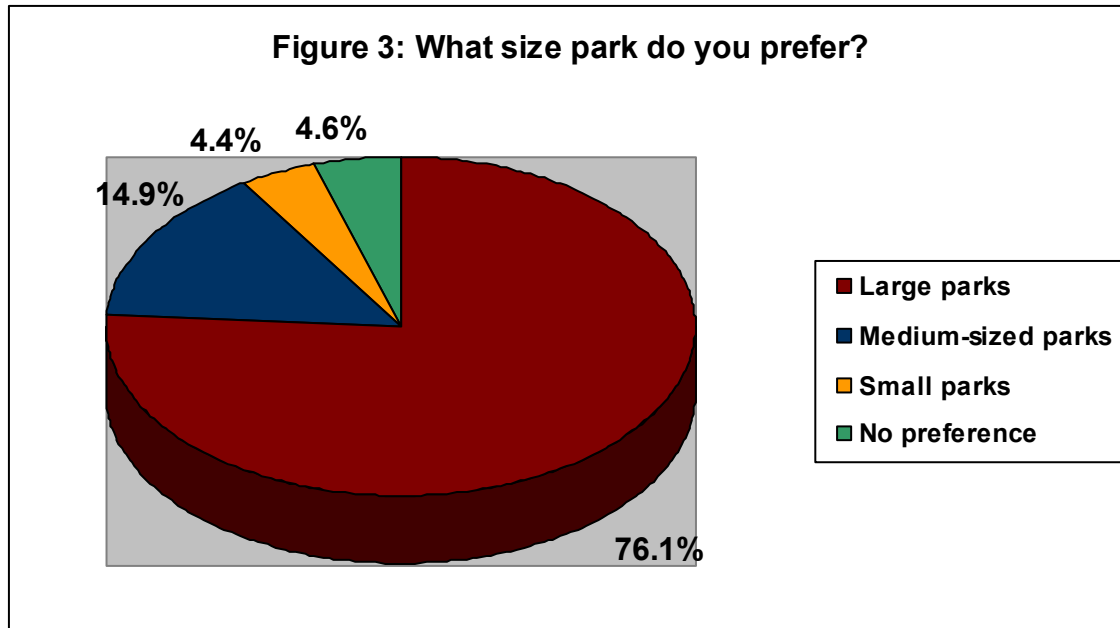


Participants in each activity were asked to rate their experience. Again, most respondents who participated in each activity rated their experience with the activity as “excellent” or “good.” The most common activity in which respondents participated was “special family events,” which includes such events as concerts, films, and festivals.



Preferences regarding parks

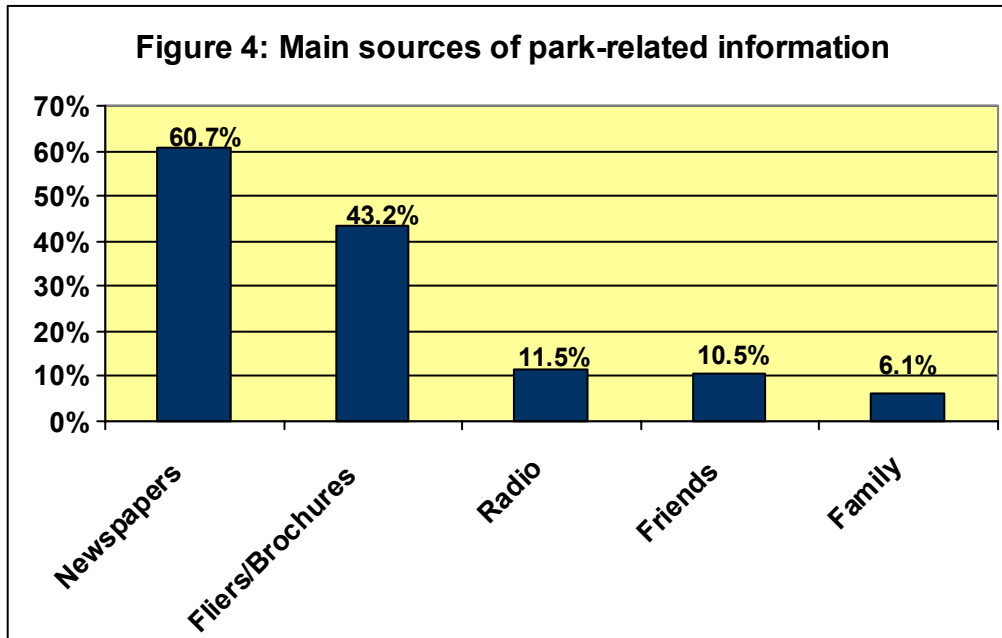
With regard to park facilities, most respondents (76.1%) prefer large parks like Donner or Mill Race Park. Another 14.9% prefer medium-sized parks such as Oakbrook or Mead Village Park. A small minority (4.4%) prefer small parks like Harrison Ridge or Ninth Street Park, and 4.6% had no preference.



Although only 9.4% of respondents report that they use Columbus Parks and Recreation Facilities to walk or exercise a dog, over 67% believe that Columbus Parks and Recreation should provide a special area for use by dogs and dog owners. Furthermore, the creation of a dog park was included among the comments and suggestions of several respondents in other sections of the questionnaire.

Communication and media

Interviewees were asked a number of questions about their radio listening, newspaper reading, and Internet usage in order to determine effective modes of communication about park programs and activities. We asked, “What are your main sources of information about programs and events sponsored by Columbus Parks and Recreation?” The most common source was the newspaper; the chart below shows other top answers.



As in the chart above, newspapers were the most common medium regularly consumed by respondents. Nearly 78% of respondents reported that they regularly read a local newspaper. In addition, sixty point five percent of respondents said they regularly listen to a local radio station. Those who regularly listen were asked which station they hear most frequently. The table below presents top radio stations mentioned by the residents we interviewed.

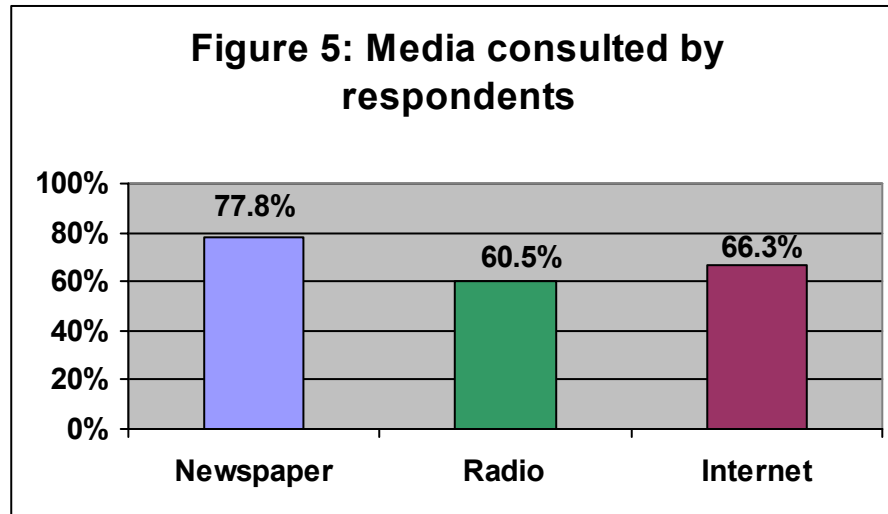
Table 4: Top local radio stations mentioned by respondents

Radio Station	% of regular radio listeners (% of total respondents)
WKKG – 101.5 FM, Columbus IN	28.6% (17.3%)
WRZQ/QMIX – 107.3 FM, Columbus, IN	25.9% (15.6%)
WCSI – 1010 AM, Columbus, IN	17.7% (10.7%)
WWWY – 106.1 FM, Columbus, IN	10.8% (6.6%)

In addition to newspapers and radio, we also asked about respondents' use of the Internet. Most respondents (66.3%) use the Internet or World Wide Web. Only 25.7% of respondents who use the Internet have used it to search for information about recreation, and just 6.3% of these respondents have visited the Columbus Parks and Recreation web site. However, 75% of respondents indicated that they would use Columbus Parks and Recreation's website to sign up for classes and programs if it were possible.

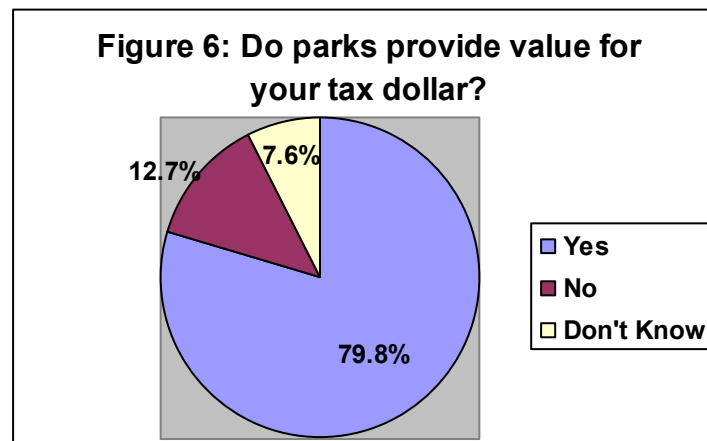
We also asked about respondents' awareness of certain park programs and media. We asked, "Would you recognize Columbus Parks and Recreation Department's logo if you saw it?" About seventy percent of respondents believe that they would recognize the logo. We also asked whether respondents were aware of Columbus Parks and Recreation's financial aid programs for children from low-income families. Most respondents (63.7%) were not aware of financial aid programs; 35.9% were aware, and 0.5% did not know.

To conclude, the medium most often used for recreation information by area residents was the local newspaper. The following chart compares the percentages of respondents who regularly consult each medium we asked about.



General satisfaction and final comments

Respondents were asked “As you know, parks are paid for by property taxes. Do you feel you are receiving value for your tax dollar?” A large majority of respondents do feel they are receiving a good value for their money. The chart below shows these results.



To complete the survey, respondents were asked two open-ended questions seeking their comments on how Columbus Parks and Recreation might improve its services and facilities. First, we asked, “What activity, program, or event would you like to see offered by Columbus Parks and Recreation that is not offered now?” Responses to this question were widely varied, so no one suggestion was made by a large number of

respondents. However, the most common responses were “free concerts or musical shows” (4.5%), “walking/jogging/fitness classes” (2.2%), and “activities for seniors” (1.5%). A full distribution of suggestions and comments on this topic can be found in Appendix C.

Finally, we asked, “what is the one thing you would like to tell the City of Columbus Parks and Recreation Department that would help better your parks?” Many respondents (43.9%) gave no comment on this subject. The most common response for those who did comment was “they’re doing a good job” (15.1%). Other top responses included requests for more security (10.7%), “keep the parks clean” (7.6%), and “they should advertise more” (4.9%).

Conclusions

Respondents were generally satisfied with the performance of the Columbus Parks and Recreation Department and with its programs, services, and facilities. A large majority of respondents feel that their parks are providing value for their tax money, that the facilities are well-maintained, and that the programs they have participated in are satisfactory.

Park facilities and services seem to be well-used, as most respondents had used some facility or participated in some program managed by the Department. Several parks, especially the larger parks like Mill Race and Donner, were visited by over half of respondents in the past year, and over half of respondents had used the facilities of the Donner Aquatics Center or Foundation for Youth pool. The vast majority of respondents

who participated in programs or activities sponsored by Columbus Parks and Recreation consistently rated their experiences as good or excellent.

Furthermore, most respondents are enthusiastic about proposals for new services and facilities such as a dog park and online sign-up for park programs.

With regard to publicity about park activities, it appears that the local newspaper would be the most efficient mode of communication. However, a significant majority of respondents also use the Internet and regularly listen to local radio.